

brown- and red-flowering edibles

111

WAKE ROBIN (*Trillium sessile*)

FLOWERS: April - June

DESCRIPTION: 3 broad, often mottled leaves. 3 petaled flower directly over leaves. Otherwise, bare stem. Lily Family.

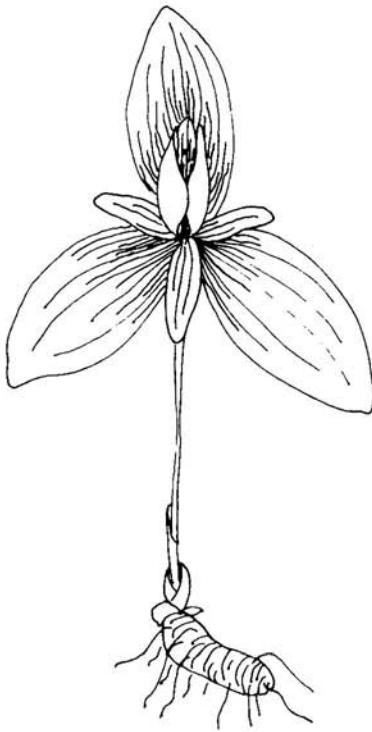
HABITAT: Low, rich bottom woods of valleys and wooded slopes

LOCATION: Southern and central Missouri

COLLECTION: March - April

USES: Potherb

113



The young shoots of wake robin may be picked as the leaves are unfolding and cooked as a green vegetable. Fernald and Kinsey report that in Maine the plant is called "Much Hunger." I personally find it more effective for its aesthetic virtues than for its culinary value. Translation: this isn't very good in flavor. Consequently, I, too, would use this plant only during times of "much hunger" as an emergency food source.

WILD GINGER (*Asarum canadense*)

FLOWERS: April - May

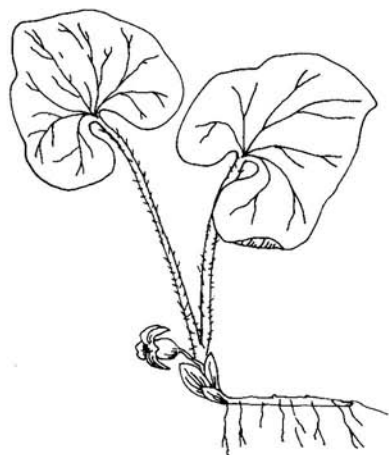
DESCRIPTION: Large, heart-shaped leaves, 6" tall, flowers near ground. Birthwort Family.

HABITAT: Rich wooded slopes, valleys, ravine bottoms, base of bluffs

LOCATION: Scattered, but absent in extreme western and south-eastern counties

COLLECTION: Spring

USES: Spice, candy, syrup



CAUTION: See page 215

These large heart-shaped leaves, which slightly resemble large violet leaves, have a beautiful and unusual flower. The flower is a brownish-mauve color and grows next to the ground. To discover the flower, pull back the leaves then hunt around at the base of the stem.

The edible portion of wild ginger is the root, which is used for candy, spice and medicinal purposes.

Digging up the root is generally not a difficult job because the plant likes rich soil. After washing the roots, cut into small discs and simmer in enough water to cover. It takes about an hour for the roots to become tender. For every cup of root, add a cup of sugar and boil until a syrup is formed. This will take about 30 minutes. Drain off the liquid and bottle. The syrup may be used as a topping for ice cream or banana splits. It may also be used as a tea by adding 1 T of the syrup to a cup of hot water. This tea is reported to be effective as a means of combating gas on the stomach.

The candied roots, which were cooked, are left to dry on waxed paper and rolled in sugar. I've had some which have kept well for two years. It still retains its strong woody flavor, which is improved when accompanied with cream cheese.

The roots may also be grated and dried for use as a substitute for ginger. It is good and may be used in any recipe calling for ginger.



PAWPAW (*Asimina triloba*)

FLOWERS: March - May

DESCRIPTION: Tree; very large (6"-12" long, 3"-5" wide), entire leaves. Leaves among the largest in U.S. Custard Apple Family.

HABITAT: Low bottom woods and wooded slopes, along streams, ravines, base of bluffs

LOCATION: Absent only from extreme northern Missouri

115

COLLECTION: September

USES: Pie, pudding, jelly, marmalade, bread

CAUTION: See page 217

Pawpaws are Missouri's answer to the banana. They are short, soft fruits about three to five inches long. The skin, unlike a banana, more nearly resembles a soft pear both in feel and appearance.

Once the pawpaws fall to the ground, long before frost, they are easy to gather ... "pickin' up pawpaws, puttin' 'em in a basket." The fruits, which turn from a yellow green to a brownish color, remind me of a cross between a persimmon and an overripe banana, but not as good as either.

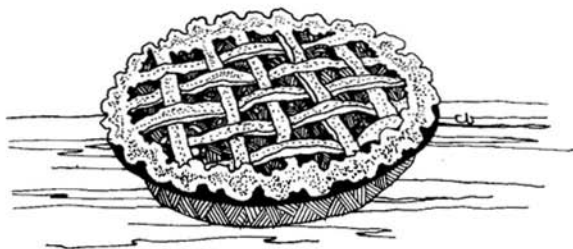
Pawpaws may be baked by placing one in foil, skin and all, and leaving for 10 minutes or so in a 350-degree oven. If you relish the campfire dessert called Banana Boats, you just might find this appealing. It is not one of my favorite dishes, however.

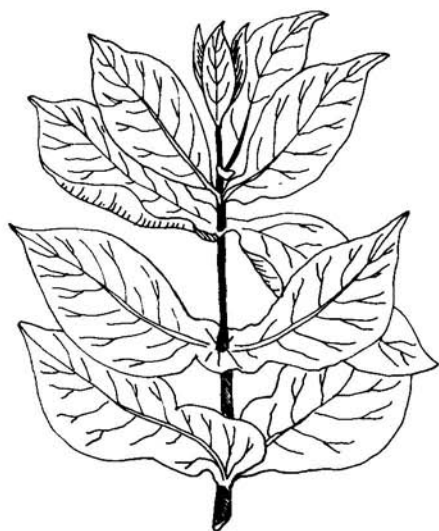
My daughter is a banana pudding fan. Substituting pawpaws for the bananas produces another very passable dessert. The following recipe is a tempting Pawpaw Chiffon Pie. Mix $\frac{1}{2}$ cup brown sugar, $\frac{1}{2}$ t salt, 1 package of Knox gelatin in a pan. Add $\frac{2}{3}$ cup milk and 3 egg yolks. Cook this mixture until it comes to a boil, then stir in 1 cup pawpaw pulp and place the mixture in the refrigerator until it is chilled. This should be around 20 - 30 minutes. Beat 3 egg whites, gradually adding $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of sugar, and mix until stiff peaks are made. Fold egg whites into the pawpaw blend and serve as a pie or pudding.

116 One of my favorite ways to use the pawpaw is to use a colander and get the pulp. Substituting the pawpaw pulp for bananas in nut bread makes a Pawpaw-Nut bread. Mash 3 pawpaws and add to the creamed cup of sugar and stick of oleo. Mix well and add 2 eggs, 2 cups flour, 1 t soda, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup hickory nuts or black walnuts. Bake in greased pan for 50 - 60 minutes.

The pawpaw may be used in ice cream or sherbets, jelly or marmalade. All are edible; none cater to my particular tastes. Like many things, a taste must be acquired to appreciate this custard apple.

I do plan to continue using this fruit. Do you suppose I'll also cultivate a taste for this wild Missouri banana?





WILD COFFEE (*Triosteum perfoliatum*)

FLOWERS: May - July

DESCRIPTION: Coarse plant; opposite, entire leaves join around stem. Fruits and flowers in leaf-axils, 2-8 at each node.
Honeysuckle Family.

HABITAT: Dry, open woods

LOCATION: Statewide, except southeast lowlands

COLLECTION: August - October

USES: Coffee substitute

117

CAUTION: The bitter roots of this plant can induce vomiting and diarrhea.

This upright, coarse plant has little orange fruits tight in the leaf axils. The fruits, which are about the size of a pea, may be dried or roasted and used as a coffee substitute.

I've never collected enough to be a judge of its desirability. I have roasted a few berries and made a weak coffee that was more than passable.

Another common name, feverwort, indicates a medicinal use for the plant's roots which were used by Indians as a cure for fevers.

**WILD ONIONS, WILD
GARLIC** (*Allium* species)

FLOWERS: May - July:
white, pink, lavender

DESCRIPTION: Field garlic
has single spathe, found
below unbel. Hollow
leaves. Wild garlic
leaves flattened, not
hollow, 3-parted
spathe at base of
umbel. Wild onion, no
spathe. Lily Family.



118

HABITAT: Varies with
species

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: April - July

USES: Vegetable, seasoning,
pickle

CAUTION: Be sure the onion odor is present. Some extremely poisonous bulbs resemble the *Allium* species, but lack the onion oil smell.

I can remember when my father would come in for the evening meal, after milking the cows, and insist that my brother and I eat a couple of green onions before dinner. This was no small feat as I did not care for onions at that age!! Nonetheless, it was a sure clue that the cows had been eating fresh wild onion and field garlic and the milk tasted. Surprisingly, the green onions helped, and we would drink our milk with only a few "YUCKS!"

When using wild onions and garlic, be certain the familiar onion odor is present as some onion-looking plants are poisonous, but they do not have an onion smell.

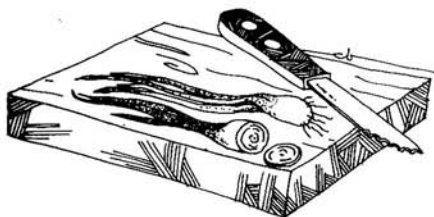
Two of the extremely poisonous lily bulbs are Fly Poison (*Amianthium muscaetoxicum*) which is located in a few counties in the southern part of the state and Death Camas (*Zigadenus Nuttallii*) which is found in Oregon County. Other poisonous bulbs include White Camas (*Zigadenus elegans*) reported by Steyermark in three counties of the southern part of Missouri, False Hellebore (*Veratrum Woodii*) found in the central and eastern counties, and Star of Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*) located in scattered sections of southern and central Missouri.

All of the *Allium* species (onion, garlic, leeks) have their flowers in an umbel while the poisonous flowers are arranged differently.

While all wild onion and garlic plants are edible, the wild field garlic, which has the single spathe below the umbel, is extremely strong in flavor, not to mention the lasting effects on the breath! The tops of the leaves may be used sparingly in salads or stews. Both the wild onion and wild garlic bulbs may be soaked in water overnight and eaten like a green onion. 119

The wild onion may be used in any way you would serve green onions: wilted lettuce, soups, stews, casseroles, with sour cream on baked potatoes, raw or pickled.

To pickle the onion, put it in the dill crock as explained on page 7.



LIVE FOREVER (*Sedum telephium*)

FLOWERS: July - October

DESCRIPTION: Thick-stemmed, thick leaves. Flower cluster at the top of stem.

Stonecrop Family.

HABITAT: Wet roadsides

LOCATION: Scattered

COLLECTION: April - July

USES: Salad, pickles, vegetable



120

Live forever is also called frog plant because a leaf may be carefully rubbed together, separating the insides. By blowing into the open end, the leaf puffs up resembling the throat of a frog. It's a game to keep young children fascinated for at least five minutes. And speaking as a teacher, that's no small feat!!

The early leaves and stem may be added to a tossed salad. I find it a bit slimy, but edible. The same parts gathered in mid-summer makes a tasty, passable green vegetable when boiled and coated with butter.

Both the early leaves and the fleshy roots may be pickled and used as a relish or in slaw or salad.



CRAB APPLES (*Pyrus*)

FLOWERS: April - May

DESCRIPTION: Tree with alternate, irregular toothed leaves. Leaves attach at a thornlike protrusion. Rose Family.

HABITAT: Escaped into fencerows, stream banks, farm lots

LOCATION: Scattered

COLLECTION: August - December

USES: Jelly, applesauce, pickle

121

One fall I had a "tasting bee" of breads and jellies made from wild edibles for my teaching colleagues. I felt compelled to forage the school yard for one entry and picked the large red crab apples from an ornamental crab tree. This jelly was a beautiful red color and delicious to eat. Further experiments proved a red applesauce made from the crab to be outstanding. It is simple to make. Cook the apples, put them through a colander and add sugar to taste. End! Would that all of my experiments were so fast, quick and good!

Spiced Crab Apple was equally successful. Heat 1 quart vinegar, 6 cups sugar, 1 T cinnamon, 1 T cloves, 1 t mace, 1 t allspice. Add crab apples and heat slowly. Leave the crab apples overnight in this syrup and pack in jars. Fill to within ½" of the top with syrup. Boil jars in water bath for 20 minutes.

The small crab apple is sour, tart and virtually inedible raw. However, it is excellent for jellies, butter and marmalade. To make jelly, place the washed apples in enough water to cover. Boil gently for 10 minutes. Pour off the liquid and measure it. For each cup

of liquid, add a cup of sugar. Because of the pectin in apples, no Sure-Jell is added. Bring to a boil until the candy thermometer registers jelly or until mixture slithers off your spoon.

Crab Apple Butter is another good way to use your crab apples. Cook the crab apples and mash the fruits through a colander. Use 2½ cups crab apple pulp, 3 cups sugar, 1 t cinnamon, 2 cinnamon sticks (1½" long each), ¼ t cloves, dash allspice, juice of ½ lemon, ½ cup Rhine wine. Cook this together until it thickens. Pour into sterilized jars and seal.

The small wild crab apple is not so good in the spiced recipe nor is it the best for applesauce; however, the jelly and butter are quite good. The wild crab apple mixed with mint for a jelly may be used later with venison or leg of lamb. A smashing mint sauce to serve with lamb and rice: 1 jar mint jelly, 1 jar currant jelly, 1 small bottle chili sauce, and 1 stick oleo. Melt all of the ingredients in a saucepan, but do not boil. When hot, remove from the stove and spoon over your lamb and rice for a heavenly taste!

